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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2008

In Today's Papers

Economic Indicators Raise Cause for Concern

All papers report sharp changes in the latest import and unemployment figures. Since November 2007, exports have dropped 22 percent; in addition, the Turkish Employment Agency announced that the number of people applying for jobs nation-wide increased 134 percent in October over the previous month. Liberal Radikal carries a front-page story with the headline, "The Prime Minister Does Not Like To Hear Pessimistic News, But Here Is the Reality," and the article reports the auto industry, which is a cornerstone of the Turkish economy, reported a 38 percent drop in auto exports. Radikal notes "The decrease in exports has dealt a blow to the farming sector," while, "The prime minister is warning the media against pessimistic reports, but the facts speak for themselves."

Finance Minister Unakitan told press he was optimistic, however, when he talked to reporters at an economic affairs seminar and said, "Turkey is not going to suffer much from the global financial crisis, thanks to the current fiscal discipline."

Parcel Bomb Explodes in AKP Building in Istanbul

All papers report that at least ten people were injured on Monday after a bomb exploded at the entrance of the ruling AKP's Istanbul headquarters. Papers report that security officers were x-raying a cargo parcel when it exploded. Medical teams rushed to the scene and transported the injured to nearby hospitals. Following the attack, Istanbul Police Chief Cerrah, Istanbul Governor Guler and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Topbas visited the site and received a briefing about the explosion. Mayor Guler told journalists that four out of ten wounded are policemen.

War Alarms Are Ringing In India, Pakistan (Sabah)

Media draw attention to the increasing tensions between India and Pakistan after last week's terror attacks in Mumbai. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "India officially sent a letter of protest to Pakistan that criticized Pakistan for not doing enough to combat terrorism on its own soil." Liberal Radikal reports, "Alarm bells are ringing as India sends a protest note to Pakistan," while U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "travels to New Delhi in an

effort to calm the tensions." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "As India summoned the Pakistani Ambassador to the Foreign Ministry, it was learned that a militant revealed the plans (for the Mumbai attack) when he was detained in February, but the information was not taken seriously." Mainstream Sabah reports in "War Alarms," that Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Riza Gilani "called an emergency session of the National Security Council," and Pakistani troops "are to be deployed to the border with India" in case "relations sour into clashes with India forces." Meanwhile, Sabah reports Condoleeza Rice "is on her way to the massacre region," in order to, "show solidarity with the Indian people." In a related story, CNN Turk reports in "American Intelligence Warned India," that, "twice, American intelligence sent warnings to India concerning a possible attack on Mumbai from the sea."

Report Highlights Two Scenarios for Turkey

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports the Western European Union and the Europe Security and Defense Assembly released a report on terrorist activities on the border between Turkey and Iraq. The report, prepared by British lawmaker Robert Walter, will be ratified Wednesday during the Assembly's meeting in Paris. According to the report, the PKK actively opposes social and political reforms in east and southeast Turkey. The report also claims that the ruling AKP's victory in mostly Kurdish areas during the July 2007 elections proves that the majority of Kurds do not want to split from Turkey. The report also claims that Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party DTP is under the PKK's influence. The report calls on EU countries to support Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq in fighting against the PKK. The report also states Turkey must be urged to not use disproportional force while

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combating PKK terror.

The report predicts two "scenarios" for Turkey. In the "optimistic" scenario, the ruling AKP will enact reforms in Turkey that include giving cultural rights for Kurds, which is expected to weaken the PKK. In the "pessimistic" scenario, the negative approach of major EU countries toward Turkey's EU membership strengthens "neo-nationalist" trends in the country, which will lead Kurdish voters to lose trust in the AKP and vote for candidates who are close to the PKK in the forthcoming municipality elections in March.

In this scenario, the PKK will be able to step up their attacks in major cities, prompting a declaration of emergency rule. The report says the EU and the U.S. can prevent the pessimistic scenario by supporting Turkey.

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Political Debates & Local Elections

Fehmi Kuru wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "Hope for change is still the ruling AKP's most compelling strategy. Turkey must settle its domestic issues and the government should be capable of implementing a policy of change so Turkey can settle its domestic issues. This is very important because Turkey has become a more important regional player, particularly in the light of Obama's victory, the withdrawal agreement between the U.S. and Iraq, and new economic balances after the global crisis."

Ergun Babahan wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Candidates for the upcoming local elections must have vision. Turkey is about to undergo local elections, and candidates are slowly being identified.

Those candidates who genuinely seek to perform public service are separated from the other candidates. I think it's sufficed to say that it is necessary for candidates to behave with sensitivity to the tensions that are going on in our country. It is possible that quality leadership in the local municipalities can spread to the national leadership level."

Ihsan Dagi wrote in Islamist-oriented Zaman: "If the AKP adopts a 'conservative democrat' approach, they can resolve the Kurdish question, but only by recognizing Kurdish identity instead of playing the 'Islam card.' In Turkey, Kurdish language and history must be recognized; Kurdish culture research centers must be established; and private Kurdish television broadcasts must be allowed. There is no difference between homogenizing 'Islamist politics' and homogenizing 'national politics' -- both approaches

reject 'Kurdish identity.' We cannot resolve the Kurdish problem via the rhetoric of 'the Islamic brotherhood.' Afghanistan is an interesting example of this. When the Taliban tried to melt the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras into a common Muslim nation, the result was a primitive and totalitarian Taliban regime."

President-elect Obama's New Cabinet

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Obama Announces Gates Will Stay at the Pentagon and Clinton is entrusted with Foreign Policy." Liberal Radikal reports, "Obama's Clintonian VIP Team Is Complete." Columnist Murat Yetkin of Radikal writes, "Despite the polarized election atmosphere, the core of Barack Obama's cabinet is remarkably above partisan tendencies," and "The key figures are very familiar with Turkey and that includes the new American Ambassador to Turkey." Mainstream Sabah focuses on the gender balance in the cabinet in, "Three Women are appointed to the New Cabinet."

Editorial Commentary on the Obama Cabinet

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Despite the polarized election atmosphere, the core of Barack Obama's cabinet is remarkably above partisan tendencies. This indicates that Washington is still in a state of war. However the composition of Obama's cabinet also shows that there will be a change in rhetoric. From Turkey's perspective, Obama's cabinet looks much better than

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the Bush administration. The key figures are all very familiar with Turkey, and that includes the new American Ambassador in Ankara as well."

Editorial Commentary on Relations Between Turkey and Armenia

Cuneyt Arcayurek wrote in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "In his meetings with Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandyan said Armenia would recognize the independence of Nagorno Karabakh. However, international law, as outlined in both UN and OSCE resolutions, declare that Nagorno Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory. Babacan has not remarked on this issue, and we haven't seen anything in the media either. President Abdullah Gul's football diplomacy efforts are seen as a diplomatic success in the Western world. Armenia, however, has not taken a single step toward resolving issues that are important for Turkey."

Higher Education Board Decree for Non-Muslims

Papers report the Higher Education Board (YOK) issued a decree to all university rectors which calls on rectors to show respect for Jewish and Christian religious holidays. The decree asked that both academic staff and students be granted leave during their respective religious holidays.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Adana Mayor Aytac Durak resigned from AKP, saying it was "insulting" that AKP party delegates would determine nominees for the upcoming municipality elections. Rumors indicate that Prime Minister Erdogan was reluctant to support Durak's candidacy in Adana in the upcoming elections.

- In Kocaeli, three people were killed and five were injured in an explosion at the municipality building during repair work on the building's natural gas system. The explosion occurred when bulldozers accidentally hit a natural gas pipe.

- A prosecutor demands up to 31 years in jail for six children who threw stones at the police during illegal protests in Adana on October 19.

International News

- Iran test-fires a newly-designed air-to-air heat-seeking missile with a range of 40 km.
- The Muslim religious holiday of Feast of Sacrifice is declared official holiday in Spain.
- The UN's drug and crime agency in Afghanistan says half of the prisoners in the country have not faced trial.

JEFFREY